

# Abroad

## Buenos Aires

*Hinge of Democracy*

Argentine voters will choose their own government this October for the first time since the 1976 coup, thus beginning a revival of traditional political life that could have immense repercussions throughout Latin America. Whoever wins, it will mean the end of military rule, which culminated in the disaster of the Falklands war. The return of Isabel Perón, widow of Juan Perón and last civilian president, from exile in Spain will play a decisive role in the choice of the nominee of the Peronista party, still the most powerful force in Argentina. The centrist Radical Party and other democratic groups are also vigorously preparing for the election. There has been no general assessment of the cause of the Falklands, or Malvinas, disaster. Although public opinion blames the now deposed General Galtieri for the conduct of the campaign, there is no disposition to abandon Argentina's traditional claim of sovereignty over the islands. It is, however, starting to be recognized that future attempts to assert such sovereignty will have to be carried out by peaceful negotiation with Britain. More pressing problems are the handling of the country's huge external debt, uncontrolled inflation, and the restoration of the potentially rich but unstable economy.

## Peking

*Pandas in Peril*

The world's surviving giant pandas, almost all of which inhabit Mainland China, are facing a new threat this year in the form of a shortage of the bamboo shoots on which they exclusively feed. The bamboo forests of Szechuan and other mountainous regions in western China have flowered and are withering, something that happens only every fifty or sixty years. Wildlife authorities here plan either to import food into the 12 reserves in which the pandas live, or else, as a last resort, move them to zoos. There are estimated to be some 1,200 pandas left living in a wild state. Meanwhile a disturbing report of the sale of panda skins has cropped up in Japan, where a collector is supposed to have bought one for \$50,000 and was offered two more at a lower price. The Mainland Chinese, who have been particularly vigilant on this score, believe, however, that the skins are either fake or else very old specimens, taken before anyone worried about the survival of the animal.

## Belize

*Fragile*

The citizens of this newest and weakest of the Central American states are relieved that no one has so far attempted to involve them in the political crisis gripping the isthmus. But they are understandably nervous. Belize, formerly British Honduras, lies below the Yucatan Peninsula and also borders on Guatemala. It has been independent for two years and enjoys parliamentary democracy and general political freedom. This is partly due to a two-thousand-man British garrison, but also to the leadership of Prime Minister George Price, who has guided Belize's 140,000 citizens through the process of achieving independence. Price's cautious economic policies have helped pre-

serve his small country from some of the worst of Central America's ills. The country's two main crops, sugar and bananas, do fairly well in a cut-throat world market, and considerable land redistribution has raised the number of sugar-cane plantations from 250 to four thousand. Politically, Price has so far been able to fight off the claim of the Guatemalan government to his country's entire territory, thanks in no small measure to the presence of the garrison. The Belize government is naturally anxious to maintain British protection, but rumors that the United States wants to establish a large military base near the capital of Belmopan have created some anxiety that it might overpower the fragile political and economic structure and introduce the kind of unrest El Salvador and Honduras are suffering.

## Paris

*Gros Rouge*

Traditional French table wine, the *gros rouge* of story and still-life, is losing its place of honor and even of use. The new generation of Frenchmen and Frenchwomen has rejected the drink of its ancestors. Adult consumption has dropped from an annual 120 liters to a mere eighty in the last twenty years, and every year in Paris, the pace-setter for taste, wine drinking goes down by 8 to 10 per cent. Significantly, the decline has not affected "good" wine that is distinguished by a regional label, or *appellation contrôlée*; and the truly fine vintages are more in demand than ever. It is that red liquid that comes in tank cars and is dispensed from spigot or bung, the strong, rough, age-old energizer of the French workingman, that is the victim. Reasons for this state of affairs are many. They include the fear of alcoholism; changes in the eating habits of the French, especially in cities where *le fast-food* is everybody's lunch; the sharp increase in the sale of fruit juices and soft drinks; and the fashion for drinking hard liquor like whisky and vodka. It is more than a sociological or health question, however, for the livelihoods of many farmers in southern and southwestern France depend on the production of table wine, as the "wine wars" with Italian and Spanish growers have recently demonstrated.



Peterson, Vancouver Sun

"Just in case, Bob Hope has penciled in Central America for his Christmas tour this year."